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RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 8518
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 1053
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE PRIORITY 1898
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 9588
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI PRIORITY 6161
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2303
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFSS/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA PRIORITY
RHMFSS/DISA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 006112

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TAGS: PREL PGOV JA

SUBJECT: A/S HILL DISCUSSES ASIA SUMMITS AND DPRK AT DINNER
WITH DG SASAE

REF: TOKYO 06057

Classified By: AMBASSADOR J. THOMAS SCHIEFFER. REASONS 1.4 (B)(D).

¶1. (C) Summary. During a dinner meeting with EAP Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill in Tokyo October 16, MOFA DG for

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Asian Affairs Kenichiro Sasae asked the U.S. to consult closely with Japan on sanctions imposed following the recent DPRK nuclear test and requested that the U.S. take additional measures to sanction North Korea, even if these would only be symbolic. A/S Hill told Sasae that the U.S. did not envision an embargo or blockade of North Korea, but rather an expansion of PSI efforts. DG Sasae also briefed on PM Abe's recent summits, describing meetings in Beijing as much more forward-looking and positive than those in Seoul. He faulted China, however, for failing to use its influence on the DPRK to help defuse tensions on the Korean peninsula. End summary.

Japan-China Relations Look to the Future

¶2. (C) PM Shinzo Abe had good meetings in Beijing on October 8, MOFA Director General for Asian Affairs Kenichiro Sasae told Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill at a dinner in Tokyo October 16. The Chinese treated Abe very well, and there was some agreement on pursuing "strategic mutual interests" in energy, the environment, regional architecture and UN reform. Sasae referred to the tone as "different views, but common interests." China also agreed to another summit meeting at APEC and to visits to Japan by China's leaders early in 2007. The meetings with Chinese President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao were cordial and direct, and issues related to Japan's war record did not play a major role in the discussions, according to Sasae. China's "unilateral" understanding seemed to be that Abe would not make any visits to Yasukuni shrine, as long as these bilateral summits were in train, but Abe had done nothing to commit to that understanding. This was the first time Japan

and China had issued a joint press statement since 1998, and Sasae found it significant that China had formalized its acceptance of Japan's peaceful role in the post-World War II world in writing. He also felt China understood Japan's interest in obtaining a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

Japan-Korea Relations Still Stuck in the Past

¶3. (C) Abe's meeting with President Roh Moo-Hyun in Seoul on October 9 was somewhat less positive, Sasae observed, although the atmosphere was still better than at other meetings in the recent past. While the Chinese seemed to consciously evoke a "new beginning," President Roh couldn't get past the war legacy, raising issues such as comfort women and history textbooks repeatedly throughout the formal meeting and dinner. Abe took a conciliatory tone with Roh, according to Sasae, promising to address the comfort women issue again by the end of 2006 and convene a joint Japan-ROK review of the textbook problem. While the DPRK nuclear test helped defuse some of the debate on historical issues -- the test occurred while Abe was en route from Beijing to Seoul -- Roh rejected Abe's overture to issue a joint statement on the DPRK. On a positive note, said Sasae, Roh seemed appreciative of the fact that Abe had wanted to visit Korea before China, and was receptive to Japan's call that the DPRK nuclear test not be allowed to derail the meeting. (Note: Abe had to schedule Beijing first due to a Korean holiday. End note.)

China Needs to do More on DPRK

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¶4. (C) China sometimes seems more interested in flexing its muscles for the United States than in playing a productive role in dealing with the DPRK, Sasae complained. While China was clearly angered by the nuclear test, they still support the Kim regime to avoid problems on their borders. Sasae believed that if China were truly serious about sanctions, they could have applied much greater pressure by now. More serious inspections of cross-border trade and a tighter noose on energy supplies were two possible measures he cited. He thought it unlikely that China would take such actions at this time, however, preferring to wait for a U.S. compromise that would allow the DPRK to save face. Sasae described a sense of "fatigue" among the elites and the military within the DPRK, and thought that further food shortages, coupled with sanctions imposed after the nuclear test, might lead to even wider dissatisfaction with the Kim regime at home.

¶5. (C) From Japan's perspective, Sasae noted, there was nothing wrong with the Kim regime failing on its own, despite potential problems with refugees and economic integration. He wasn't sure whether the DPRK would come back to the Six-Party Talks or not, but felt that this latest round of brinksmanship could hurt Kim at home. Many believe Kim had opted to test a nuclear device to strengthen his position domestically, he said. Others believed his goal all along was to develop a nuclear capability, and the Six-Party Talks were merely a way to gain time. Sasae dismissed Kim's statements that the imposition of sanctions would amount to a declaration of war as nothing but routine rhetoric for the DPRK leader. He wondered if perhaps Kim thought that fears over conflict on the Korean Peninsula would bring the United States to bilateral talks.

Japan Seeks Guidance, Symbolic Action From U.S. on Sanctions

¶6. (C) Sasae asked A/S Hill for U.S. assistance in giving

Japan a boost domestically on the sanctions issue through some sort of "symbolic" gesture. For example, the United States had proposed the ban on exports of luxury goods and so the United States should take a leading role in the Sanctions Committee to define the terms, even though it does not export any of those items to the DPRK. Sasae pointed out that PM Abe had explicitly linked Japan's own unilateral sanctions not only to the nuclear test, but to the DPRK abductions issue as well, a fundamental focus of his foreign policy. Should additional sanctions prove necessary, Sasae said, Japan might consider such measures as extending the ban on port calls to vessels other than DPRK-flagged ships, restricting financial transactions with any banks doing business with the DPRK, or limiting additional categories of exports.

¶7. (C) Proposed cargo inspections had the potential to be more problematic, Sasae cautioned, and urged the United States to provide clear guidance on implementation. Japan was willing to take action, he said, but had to be cognizant of limitations imposed by the domestic political and legal framework. He thought that both MOFA and the Japan Defense Agency would seek formal clarification sometime shortly after important October 22 by-elections, and urged the U.S. to work with Japan to resolve these issues together. The Japanese press was already spinning the story to make these cargo inspections seem more like a blockade, Sasae warned. The issue would almost certainly be raised with the Secretary by journalists during her visit to Tokyo on October 18-19, he predicted. Sasae advised that the Secretary say only that the U.S. was still considering how to implement the sanctions. He thought that Thailand, currently the DPRK's fifth-largest trading partner, would be looking for guidance from the U.S. as well.

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¶8. (C) A/S Hill assured Sasae that the U.S. envisioned the cargo inspections as more an extension of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) than an embargo or blockade, and promised to continue to coordinate closely.

¶9. (U) A/S Hill has cleared this message.
SCHIEFFER